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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on Prevention of
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Agenda item 18

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT:

(b) Population displacements

Written statement submitted by International Educational Development, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following communication, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[10 August 1995]

1. Population displacements, especially those stemming from war or serious violations of human rights, are now of such a scale that international and national aid programmes cannot possibly attend to the needs of the people affected. From one perspective, population displacements arise because the international community has failed to contribute positively to improvements in human rights or the resolution of conflicts in areas now overwhelmed by displacements. Accordingly, it is useful to study some current situations with a view that with better understanding, current problems may be resolved and future ones prevented.

2. The Karenni people are suffering yet again from massive displacement due to the dramatic increase in incursions into Karenni territory by the armed forces of the Myanmar State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in contravention of an agreement worked out by the Karenni National Progressive Party and SLORC on 21 March 1995.

3. On 30 June, fighting broke out at the Kauk Kauk and Mae Su Rin confluence. Since that date, there have been intense military confrontations between the Karenni armed forces and SLORC troops. Hundreds of Karenni people have been abducted for slave porterage and their tractors, bullocks and horses have been requisitioned. More than 5,000 more Karenni have been forced to flee to the already overcrowded camps in the Thai border area.

4. Now SLORC is proclaiming internationally that this clear violation of the Loikaw agreement is necessary to be able to attack the Mong Tai headquarters of Khun Sa. This cannot possibly be true, as attempting to launch such an attack from Karenni territory makes no military sense whatsoever. Clearly the facts speak for themselves - SLORC has initiated a blatant attack on the Karenni in order to neutralize their armed forces and subjugate the people.

5. This displacement follows the massive displacement of the Karenni people in January 1995, when SLORC troops attacked Manerplaw. This attack came immediately after a SLORC representative denied to the General Assembly that there was any military build-up. Rather, he maintained that SLORC was actively working towards a cease-fire. More shocking, the attack came as the SLORC regime greeted a special envoy of the Secretary-General. At that time, SLORC troops were positioned across the river from the refugee village of Htoo Wah Lu.

6. In Sri Lanka, renewed hostilities between the Sinhala-dominated Government and the Tamil people have also caused massive displacements. There may be as many as 350,000 newly displaced in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan army is carrying out wholesale targeting of the civilian population in violation of humanitarian law norms. Air bombing attacks on civilian areas (including churches, schools and hospitals) are a major factor in the displacements.

7. International Educational Development is also concerned about actions taken by the Bosnian Serb forces against civilians in the United Nations protected areas. A large number of Bosnian Muslims who had sought shelter in Srebrenica have had to flee again, this time to Tuzla. Tuzla, meanwhile, has already been vastly overtaxed by earlier displacements. The Serbian forces have also prevented humanitarian aid from reaching people, resulting in additional casualties from starvation and near starvation. The Bosnian Serb plan seems to be to eliminate any non-Serbian people from Serbian-occupied Bosnia.

8. Bosnian Croats have also been massively displaced. Estimates indicate up to 70 per cent of their population has been forced to flee. For example, out of 80,000 Croats living in Banja Luka, 55,000 were "expelled" by Serbian militia. The area has been "renamed" Republika Srpska. These people were forced to give away their property and even to pay for their transportation out. Thus, they are reduced to poverty and must rely on international aid to survive.

9. Croatian Serbs are now facing massive displacement from the areas recently returned to Croatian control (the area the Serbian forces called Krajina). Some 30,000 to 40,000 are fleeing into Bosnia and Herzegovina. While the Croatian president is urging these people not to flee and promising them safety, it is clear that they do not feel secure enough to stay. As this

is being written, the Croatian Government is inviting those who have fled to return and promising them that they will enjoy full rights.

10. In situations such as these three, the Sub-Commission should take firm action within its mandate. The Sub-Commission can appeal to Governments to increase contributions to UNHCR so that it can meet the crushing international need. The Sub-Commission can request the High Commissioner for Human Rights or the Secretary-General to use good offices. Of course, it can condemn Governments for violations of armed conflict (humanitarian) law norms - a major factor in displacements. It can invite parties to conflicts to meet with it in private session as a means to facilitate conflict resolution. It can transmit relevant information to the representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons. It can seek to address the perceived lacuna in international protection of internally displaced persons. In sum, the Sub-Commission has an open mandate that allows for any number of useful and creative actions to address this problem. What is important is that the Sub-Commission do something.